

TESTIMONY OF THE
CONNECTICUT COALITION
FOR ***JUSTICE***
IN EDUCATION FUNDING
TO THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 21, 2012

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding appreciates this opportunity to submit comments on **Governor's Bill No. 24 — An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness**.

CCJEF wishes to formally express to the Education Committee its sincere appreciation for Governor Malloy's focus on education during this short legislative session and members' commitment to hearing and evaluating all of these proposals.

CCJEF's mission is to bring about reforms to the fiscal infrastructure of public schooling so as to ensure equal educational opportunity and quality schooling for all. Today, we express opinions on items on your agenda that we see as integral to the provision of an adequate and equitable education for all children in Connecticut.

- **Section 17: “Best Teacher Scholarship Program”** (line 1575) — This section would provide grants and loan reimbursements to students who demonstrate exemplary academic achievement in pursuit of their teacher training and commit to be employed in a priority school district or a school within the commissioner's network. Competent, qualified teachers in every classroom and in every school are a foundational resource essential for providing students an adequate education. The difficulties that high-needs districts and struggling schools have in attracting and retaining outstanding teachers has long been recognized as a prime obstacle to ensuring resource equity, and to date there has been too little progress in motivating our most promising new teachers to apply for such positions. The issue is especially urgent as veteran teachers in our most challenged school districts prepare to retire. For these reasons, **CCJEF strongly supports this proposed “best teacher scholarship program.”**

Because it is important to encourage our high school and college graduates to remain in Connecticut after graduation and to expand the number of minority teachers and those seeking certification in shortage areas like STEM and ELL, we suggest that the award of such grants and loan reimbursements be targeted to candidates enrolled in Connecticut institutions of higher education who might advance these and other such multiple goals.

- **Section 24: Connecticut School Leadership Academy** (line 2421) — This section would create an “Academy” to provide educational management and professional development programming to school leaders from districts or schools designated as low

achieving. While professional development is an essential component for providing an adequate education, little information about the proposed Academy is contained in this section except for a provision that would allow the state to pass off the cost of participation onto the fiscally distressed districts. Such mandated interventions that come on the heels of decades of state underfunding of these districts should be part of the routine services provided by and included in the budget of the State Department of Education. **CCJEF supports the notion of professional development for personnel from low-achieving districts but opposes any requirement that those districts contribute to the cost.**

- **Sections 28: Professional development; subsections (2)(A), (2)(D), and (2)(E) —** Sustained high-quality professional development is an essential component of providing an adequate education, in that it is critical to maintaining competent, qualified professionals in every classroom, school, and district. **CCJEF supports the subsection (line 2849) that would tighten, at least somewhat, the requirement for all certified employees to participate in professional development. We also support the subsection (line 2914) that provides for the Department of Education to audit professional development programs** provided by local and regional boards of education — an audit provision that we believe should be extended to include RESC-operated professional development programs. **CCJEF also endorses the subsection (line 2913) that defines professional development programs**, which we believe captures well the essence of high-quality professional development.
- **Sec. 35: Coordinated system of early care and education and child development (line 3623)** — Subsection (b) would create a unified set of reporting requirements that incorporates the quality rating and improvement system developed by the Department of Education covering home-based, center-based, and school-based early child care and learning. Inasmuch as high-quality early childhood programs, including universal preschool, are integral to providing an adequate education, **CCJEF strongly supports the provisions of Sec. 35(b).**
- **Sec. 36: District website posting of choice options (line 3689)** — This section would require local and regional school districts to post on their websites information about the plethora of choice programs to which students might apply. This proposed new provision would require considerable website redesign and maintenance/upkeep, a not insubstantial burden that many districts already struggle with, and would therefore make this new requirement an unfunded mandate. Because Internet users can readily find such information elsewhere, including on the Department of Education’s website, **CCJEF opposes the addition of this unnecessary unfunded mandate.**
- **Sec. 52: Granting of additional state charters** — This section would further expand the granting of charters by the State Board of Education. On equity grounds, CCJEF raises several concerns about this section. **Sec. 52(c)** (line 4205) specifies that preference to applicants for charter schools will be given to those programs designed to serve one or more of these student populations: students with low academic performance, low-income children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, students with behavioral or social difficulties, or students who require special education services or are English-language learners. **Sec. 52(d)** (line 4235) waives the lottery process to enable this to happen, and

Sec. 52(g) (line 4345) makes these enrollment categories part of the charter renewal process.

CCJEF supports the expansion of school choice programs but urges that unless a charter applicant is proposing a uniquely narrowly-targeted program (e.g., one designed specifically for students with challenging behaviors and social difficulties), all new charters should be required to recruit, enroll, and effectively serve students from all these and every other student demographic category. Equity demands that all children have an equal opportunity for admission to these boutique schools funded with public dollars, and until now that has not been the case. Admission should be on a “no excuses” basis — that is, there should be no excuses for not enrolling any student, and like traditional public schools, charter schools should be expected and required to serve all students.

Also totally absent from Sec. 52 is any requirement for racial and economic diversity. Without such language the legislation fails to ensure the kind of equity that is required under *Sheff v. O’Neill* and would further allow the continued trend of newer charter schools to be all-minority schools. Ample research evidence attests to the imperative of mixed-race/mixed income schooling if we are to improve student outcomes, close the achievement gap, and adequately and equitably educate students for the multicultural world that exists beyond the schoolhouse door.

CCJEF calls upon the Education Committee to rectify this serious oversight by adding a statutory requirement that all new charter applicants must attract and maintain an equitable enrollment mix — e.g., the same kind of rules under which inter-district magnet schools are required to operate if they are to receive public funding, or rules like the racial balancing provisions that traditional public school districts are required to meet — and further, that the charters of existing charter schools will not be renewed unless their enrollments have met such diversity requirements.

For the above reasons of equity and justice, **CCJEF opposes Sec. 52 as it is now written and urges that the diversity of race, income, and learning needs be added and emphasized throughout this section as hard-and-fast requirements for all charter schools.**

Respectfully submitted,

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The Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF) is a broad-based coalition of municipalities, local boards of education, statewide professional education associations, unions, and other pro-education advocacy organizations, parents and schoolchildren aged 18 or older, and other concerned Connecticut taxpayers. Member school communities are home to nearly half of Connecticut’s public school students, including some three-fourths of all minority students, those from low-income families, and students from homes where English is not the primary language.